

The Humility of God: On a Disputed Question in Trinitarian Theology

JOHN R. BETZ
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN

“Do you want to grasp the majesty of God? First grasp the humility of God. . . . When you grasp his humility, you will rise with him.
—Augustine, *Sermones*¹

The property of love is never to seek itself, to keep back nothing, but to give everything to the one it loves.
—John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*²

AMONG THE MORE DISPUTED theological questions of the last fifty years has been the question of whether the kenosis of the Son

¹ Sermon 117, ch. 10, no. 17: “*Vis capere celsitudinem Dei? Cape prius humilitatem Dei. . . . Cum ceperis humilitatem eius, surgis cum illo.*” Cf. *De catechizandis rudibus* 4.8: “Magna est enim miseria superbus homo, sed maior misericordia humilis Deus” (“It is surely a great misery to be a proud man, but an even greater mercy that God is humble”). Thanks to Brian Daley for this reference, for his gracious comments on this article, and for showing how the Angelic Doctor could stand to be supplemented by Ignatius, among others. Indeed, Ignatius’s late epitaph is a key to the argument advanced here: “non coerceri maximo, contineri minimo, divinum est” (“To be uncoerced by the greatest and held by the smallest is divine”). Thanks also to Michael Altenburger, David Hart, Nicholas Healy, Michael Magree, S.J., Aaron Pidel, S.J., and Alexis Torrance for help with or helpful comments on various aspects of this article. Finally, I would like to thank Matt Levering, for whom this was written, and to whom, logically, it is also dedicated.

² John of the Cross, *Collected Works of John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, DC: ICS, 1991), 351.

of God in time (Phil 2:6–11) points to a kenosis within the immanent Trinity as its transcendent archetype. Hans Urs von Balthasar famously answered this question in the affirmative, and strikingly so: not only does the temporal kenosis of the Son reflect an eternal kenosis in the form of the Son's eternal humility and obedience with respect to the Father; this same *phenomenal* kenosis invites us *speculatively* to consider as its ultimate transcendental condition a *primordial* kenosis—an *Ur*-kenosis—that consists in the Father's eternally emptying himself in giving his Son all that he has and all that he is.³ For Balthasar, in other words, the Son's temporal kenosis is ultimately a reflection of a reflection, a mimetic enactment of the Father's own total gift of himself in begetting him.

Contemporary Thomists, on the other hand, have tended to reject the notion of an intra-Trinitarian kenosis on the grounds that it introduces a category distinctive to the economy and bound up with the contingency of creation, into the divine nature. As Bruce Marshall, among the keenest of contemporary Thomists, puts it with his sights set on Balthasar and others: "Our understanding of how the three persons are one God must not be infiltrated or 'contaminated,' as it were, by terms and concepts that refer only to the economy."⁴ In other words, Marshall thinks, Balthasar ends up confusing theology proper (i.e., the doctrine of God) with what takes place in the economy (owing in part to the mischief he sees in Franz Anton Staudenmaier's distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity), and as a result ascribes things to God—kenosis, (infinite) distance between Father and Son, and even a kind of suffering—that cannot be reconciled with traditional divine attributes such as simplicity and impassibility.⁵

Others, such as Thomas Joseph White, O.P., Joshua Brotherton, and Guy Mansini, O.S.B., have voiced similar concerns, ranging from measured reservation to outright alarm. All of them, however, worry that

³ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 4 [hereafter, TD IV] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 325. Cf. *Theo-Drama*, vol. 5 [hereafter, TD V] (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 243: "The ontic possibility for God's self-emptying in the Incarnation and death of Jesus lies in God's eternal self-emptying in the mutual self-surrender of the Persons of the Trinity."

⁴ Bruce Marshall, "The Unity of the Triune God: Reviving an Ancient Question," *The Thomist* 74 (2010): 17.

⁵ Following Thomas, therefore, Marshall counsels, we would do well to distinguish more sharply between the processions and the missions, so that we are not tempted to back-read the latter into the former; see Bruce Marshall, "The Dereliction of Christ and the Impassibility of God," in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 246–98.

Balthasar not only “projects” words and concepts proper to creatures, such as “enrichment” and “surprise,” into the divine life, but that his dramatic theology, which presents the persons of the Trinity as a veritable cast of characters, *dramatis personae*, willy-nilly turns Christianity into tritheism, and theology into mythology.⁶ Indeed, in the words of Mansini, perhaps the harshest of Balthasar’s critics, “the Trinitarian kenosis of Balthasar destroys the Trinitarian theology of the Church.”⁷

Such, then, is the *status quaestionis*: both Balthasar and the Thomists would seem to have theologically justifiable positions. They could even be said to have grounds for anathematizing one another. If the Thomists find Balthasar guilty of mythologizing theology and destroying Trinitarian theology, Balthasarians, in turn, could argue that the Thomists have not only failed to understand the meaning of the word revelation, but have turned the phenomenal glory of God (in his kenosis) into an unbelievably sterile system, a skeleton of propositions without spirit and life. Of course, these may be exaggerations; nevertheless, we would seem to be faced with a theological impasse comparable to that between the Dominicans and the Jesuits at the time of the *de auxiliis* controversy—an aporia not just between the apparent positions of Thomas and Balthasar (the *quondam* Jesuit), but one more broadly between the journals dedicated to their respective legacies, *The Thomist* and *Communio*.

How, then, ought we proceed? Should we wait for another papal decree to bring an end to the dispute, which is highly unlikely given its speculative nature and far more pressing practical concerns? Or should we at once

⁶ See: Guy Mansini, O.S.B., “Balthasar and the Theodramatic Enrichment of the Trinity,” in (not surprisingly) *The Thomist* 64, no. 4 (2000): 499–519; Mansini, “Can Humility and Obedience Be Trinitarian Realities?” in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, ed. Bruce McCormack and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 71–98; Mansini, “Obedience Religious, Christological, and Trinitarian,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12 (2014): 395–413; and most recently, “Hegel and Christian Theology,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 14 (2016): 993–1001. For a more charitable but similarly critical account, see: Thomas Joseph White’s magisterial study, *The Incarnate Lord: A Study in Thomistic Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 381–437; White, “Intra-Trinitarian Obedience and Nicene-Chalcedonian Christology,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 6 (2008): 377–402. See also Joshua Brotherton, “God’s Relation to Evil: Maritain and Balthasar on Divine Impassibility,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80 (2015): 191–211; Brotherton, “Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity after Balthasar,” *The Thomist* 82 (2018): 189–234; and Bertrand de Margerie, “Note on Balthasar’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 64, no. 1 (2000): 127–30.

⁷ Mansini, “Hegel and Christian Theology,” 999.

recognize with Paul V that the lack of theological resolution is itself a sign of mystery, and that no one school can claim to have a definitive grasp of it? This, I submit, would be a genuinely Catholic way forward, especially when two faithful Catholic theologians are in disagreement with one another. For the *Catholic* Church has never been the Church of Thomas *alone* or of Balthasar *alone*, or for that matter, of any one theologian alone, as Möhler reminded us vis-à-vis the spirit of the Reformation in his *Symbolik*. Rather, though the Church sometimes signals its preference for one theologian (as Leo XIII did by promoting Thomas in *Aeterni Patris*), it has from the beginning been a polyphonic Church (the Church of Peter, John, and Paul, et al.), whose distinct voices are orchestrated by the one Spirit—even if the Spirit’s polyphony is beyond our range of hearing.

But this does not mean that it would be fruitless to add one’s voice to the discussion. For, trusting in the creativity of the Spirit, we may still hope for some kind of resolution that recognizes the *particula veri* on both sides of this debate, and therewith the possibility of their deeper integration. As White puts it with regard to Balthasar, “monolithic theological projects have to undergo revision, critique, and reconsideration so that the genuine insights of a given theological or literary genius might be integrated rightly and in true fashion into the catholicity—the universality—of the common communion of the whole church.”⁸ I could not agree more.

To our common end, therefore, let us put Balthasar’s theology to the test to see whether it stands up to Thomistic criticism. In the process I hope to show that, while the Thomists have legitimate concerns, they are greatly mitigated by Balthasar’s unwavering commitment to the *Thomistic* principle of the *analogia entis* as he inherited it from Erich Przywara.⁹ For not only does the *analogia entis* set the metaphysical stage for Balthasar’s dramatic theology (precisely in the way that theology presupposes philosophy); it also sets important limits to its interpretation. At the same time, however, it will be necessary to call into question various certainties of the Thomists, above all their exclusion of humility from the divine nature as something defective, contingently assumed for the purposes of redemption, and unbecoming of God in himself. Here, too, Przywara will enter

⁸ White, *Incarnate Lord*, 437.

⁹ See Werner Löser, *Geschenkte Wahrheit: Annäherungen an das Werk Hans Urs von Balthasars* (Würzburg: Echter, 2015), 42: “Man kann gar nicht genug herausstellen, dass von Balthasar bis an sein Lebensende darum bemüht war, ein philosophisches und theologisches Denken im Sinne der analogia-entis-Lehre zu entfalten” (“One cannot possibly emphasize enough that, to the end of his life, Balthasar strove to develop philosophical and theological thought in keeping with the doctrine of the *analogia entis*”; translation mine).

the picture as a uniquely mediating voice since he stands in many ways between Thomas and Balthasar. Specifically, with Przywara's help, I hope to show how Thomas's own teachings on divine power and simplicity are more amenable to Balthsarian emendation than meets the eye, and that Thomas's own theology begs us to consider more carefully the conclusion that Balthasar draws: that the Almighty is also humble, not merely as an accident of the economy of salvation, but in himself. For, as Balthasar and no less a doctor of the Church than John of the Cross have recognized, it is the *nature* of love to lower itself, indeed, to empty itself, out of love for the beloved.¹⁰

So, then, can Thomas and Balthasar be reconciled, and with them the schools associated with them? Certainly, if in Catholic theology the theologians, no less than other members of the Church, are members of one another in one body (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:25) and subject to mutual correction under the influence of their one Head. Again, this is not to deny that each side in this debate has a theologically defensible position; still less is it to suggest that truth, which we understandably associate with position, does not matter. For the truth of Trinitarian theology is indeed what is at issue here. But in Catholic theology, which understands position itself in dynamic terms (because it understands every real *archê* as the origin of love), neither is there any room for *entrenched* positions, which engender hostility and mutual suspicion. On the contrary, in Catholic theology, for reasons of Trinitarian theology as well as ecclesiology, there can never be anything more than op-position within the analogy of faith, in which oppositions are related in love (*allo pros allo*). And this means a charitable going forth (*pros*) to meet the other (*allo*)—not for the sake of cheap compromises that will not last, and from which nothing new can be expected, but for the sake of greater enlightenment. To this end, therefore, let us follow the advice given by Erasmus in his debate with Luther: let us have a *collatio* for the sake of *illuminatio*; let us have a real *diatribe*—not in the conventional understanding of the word, but in keeping with its etymological sense as a rubbing together of real oppositions in the hope of kindling a fire and producing light.

Before we can bring opposing positions together, however, we need to understand them, insofar as we can, on their own terms and in light of their specific contexts. With regard to Thomas, certainly, there is no need to rehearse what others have already done, and can do better. As far as Balthasar is concerned, however, there may still be work to be done, specif-

¹⁰ Such is the close connection between humility and kenosis, and the reason that they will be treated here as virtually synonymous.

ically with regard to understanding the context and origins of his kenotic theology. To this end let us first consider, if only briefly, his context in the German tradition, and the literary, philosophical, and theological sources of modern kenoticism in particular.

A Brief History of Kenosis in the German Tradition

The first thing to keep in mind about Balthasar's theology of kenosis is that it stands in a long tradition of German theological reflection on this topic, the most famous example of which is the so-called "kenosis controversy" that took place among Lutheran scholastics during the early seventeenth century. What was at issue in this controversy was whether the Son of God emptied himself so fully of his divinity as to abstain entirely from divine prerogatives, as the Giessen faculty argued (following Martin Chemnitz), or whether his kenosis entailed merely the cloaking of his divinity (following Johannes Brenz), which permitted the cryptic exercise of his power and authority, as the Tübingen faculty maintained.¹¹ Since these debates were largely a matter of Christology, what was not at issue was the further question of what the kenosis of the Son of God might mean for Trinitarian doctrine.¹²

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, kenosis had become a broader trope for understanding all the works of the economic Trinity. For the Lutheran author and critic J. G. Hamann, for example, who developed insights of his teacher Martin Knutzen,¹³ it was the key to understanding

¹¹ For a venerable account, see the entry on Christology in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, 13 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 3:57–63.

¹² For an excellent and substantial historical overview, see Thomas R. Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Kenotic Christology: The Waxing, Waning, and Weighing of a Quest for a Coherent Orthodoxy," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. Stephen C. Evans (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2006), 74–111.

¹³ See in particular Martin Knutzen's *Betrachtungen über die Schreibart der Heiligen Schrift in Philosophischer Beweis von der Wahrheit der christlichen Religion* (1747), ed. Ulrich Lehner with introduction (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2005), 227–40, esp. 229–30: "Bei dieser großen Herunterlaßung der höchsten Weisheit, bey diesem ungekünstelt einfältigen Vortrage, leuchten indeßen doch hin und wieder die Strahlen der göttlichen Herrlichkeit hervor. GOTT [*sic*] bedeck zwar sein Antlitz in der Schrift mit dem schlecht scheinenden Vorgage, wie Moses, weil unsere blöde Gemüthsäugen sein Anschauen vielweniger, als jene Israeliten des Mosis Glanz, vertragen können. . . . Das geoffenbarte Wort GOTTES [*sic*] hat, wie der vortreffliche Rollin anmerket, hierinnen eine besondere Aehnlichkeit mit dem selbständigen Worte des Lebens. Dieser eingeborne Sohn GOTTES verbag

not only the kenotic form of Christ, but also the kenotic form of Scripture (as appropriated to the Spirit) and the kenotic form of creation (as appropriated to the Father).¹⁴ In other words, in Hamann, kenosis became a trope for understanding the *unity* of all the persons of the Trinity *ad extra*. As he put it in his *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters* (1762):

It is proper to the unity of divine revelation that, by means of the styluses [*Griffel*] of the holy men he inspired, the Holy Spirit should have lowered himself and emptied himself of his majesty, just as the Son of God did in assuming the form of a servant, and just as the whole of creation is a work of the greatest humility.¹⁵

Similarly, in his *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762), he writes: “The unity of the author is reflected in the dialect of his works—in all things *one* tone of immeasurable height and depth! A proof of the most glorious majesty and of the most complete self-emptying!”¹⁶ As Balthasar observes in reference to these and related passages: “It is not just that Hamann marvels at the servant-form [*Knechtsgestalt*] of the Word in Holy Scripture (the very notion [of Holy Scripture] is almost a contradiction!); he marvels even prior to that at the ‘humility’ of God in the speech of creation, which well before Golgotha made the law of *moria*, of folly (Hamann writes the word in capital letters),

die Größe seiner Majestät, so zu reden, unter der verächtlichen Knechts-Gestalt” (“From such great condescension on the part of the greatest wisdom, from such an unaffected and simple presentation, there nevertheless gleam here and there the beams of divine glory. Like Moses, GOD [*sic*] covers his face in Scripture with what to all appearances is a poor presentation; for the dim-witted eyes of our minds can bear his appearance even less than the Israelites could bear the glory of Moses...In this respect, as the excellent Rollin has observed, the revealed Word of GOD bears a certain similarity to the Word of Life himself. This only-begotten Son of GOD hid the greatness of his majesty, so to speak, beneath the contemptible form of a slave [*Knechtsgestalt*]”; translation mine).

¹⁴ For Hamann’s understanding of Scripture, see John Betz, “Glory(ing) in the Humility of the Word: The Kenotic Form of Revelation in J. G. Hamann,” *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010): 141–79, and Betz, *After Enlightenment: The Post-Secular Vision of J. G. Hamann* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), esp. 43–45, 84–87, and 113–28.

¹⁵ Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols., ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna: Herder, 1949–1957), 2:171 (translations from Hamann are my own). As Hamann also put it to Kant around the same time, “creation is not a work of vanity, but of humility, of condescension”; see Johann Georg Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 6 vols., ed. Walther Ziesemer and Arthur Henkel (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955–1975), 1:452.

¹⁶ Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:204.

into the law of the world.”¹⁷ In sum, for Hamann, kenosis and humility—for present purposes the two are interchangeable—are not accidental features of God’s self-revelation, but consistent *characteristics* of it.

To be sure, when Hamann speaks of divine humility or kenosis, he has in mind *the economy of salvation*, and especially the ways in which God, by virtue of his humility, remains *hidden* from the proud in the midst of his self-revelation, in keeping with Christ’s words: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding and revealed them to babes” (Matt 11:25). Accordingly, with a keen eye for divine ironies, he liked to point out to his “enlightened” and “mature” contemporaries that God’s ways will invariably be *obscure* and incomprehensible to all who rely on (superficial) reason alone, who in the blindness of their pride cannot see in the earthiness of creation, in the sometimes crude stories of Israel, and in the lowly figure of the carpenter’s son the reality of a *deeper* Logos who falls consistently beneath their gaze. Furthermore, for Hamann, humility serves an important purpose *within* the economy of salvation: it keeps at a distance and bars from the mysteries by an implicit rather than explicit judgment anyone who would refuse to humble himself and bow before a Logos deeper—and therefore higher—than his own.¹⁸

But as these same passages also suggest, for Hamann, humility is not simply a feature of the economy of salvation. For “the *unity of the author* is reflected in the dialect of his works.”¹⁹ In other words, Hamann gives us every reason to believe that there is a connection between the humility God shows in the economy of salvation and the nature and unity of God *in se*, and that the works of the Trinity *ad extra* are an analogous *expression* of the nature of the Trinity *ad intra*.²⁰ In what sense humility might be predicated of the persons of the immanent Trinity, however, or in what

¹⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele: Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*, vol. 1, *Der Deutsche Idealismus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1998), 60.

¹⁸ As he puts it, again in the *Cloverleaf of Hellenistic Letters*: “If the divine style elects the foolish—the trite—the ignoble—in order to put to shame the strength and ingenuity of all profane authors: then it almost goes without saying that eyes that are illumined, inspired, and armed with the jealousy of a friend, an intimate, a lover are required in order to see in such disguise the beams of heavenly glory” (Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:171).

¹⁹ Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:204 (my emphasis).

²⁰ This is corroborated by Hamann’s consistent existential refusal to separate thought from life, form from content, etc., as when he quotes Buffon with approval, saying: “Le style est l’homme même” (*Sämtliche Werke*, 4:424).

sense the unity of God *in se* might be a function of humility, Hamann does not say, except to suggest throughout his writings, almost as their *basso continuo*, that in God majesty and abasement, glory and kenosis, Golgotha and *Scheblimini* are one—and that the irony of the “Enlightenment” was that the *Aufklärer*, who believed themselves to be enlightened, were blind to this revelation.²¹ As Balthasar keenly observes, anticipating one of the great themes of his theology: “This revelation of the humility of God is that of His glory.”²²

While Hamann himself was averse to the kind of speculation one subsequently finds in German Idealism, such ideas, allowing for a possible admixture of Lurianic Kabbalah, were readily picked up by Schelling and Hegel, each of whom, for all their other differences, came to understand creation in terms of a divine kenosis—whether as a matter of divine necessity (Hegel) or divine freedom (Schelling). As Schelling put it, inspired by his first enthusiastic reading of Hamann: “The external creation, says J.G. Hamann, is a work of the greatest humility; the spiritual doctors are unanimous in their view of creation as an act of condescension.”²³ Whatever one makes of Schelling’s reading of Hamann, which was at the heart of his vitriolic debate with Friedrich Jacobi in 1811, the concept of kenosis subsequently became an important feature of his philosophy, especially his late philosophy of revelation, which represents his (and philosophy’s) most sophisticated attempt to understand the doctrine of the Trinity.²⁴

²¹ Hamann, *Golgotha and Scheblimini! Von einem Prediger in der Wüsten* [sic], in *Sämtliche Werke*, 3:291–320. *Scheblimini* is a reference to Ps 110:1 and, specifically, to the majesty indicated by the phrase “Sit Thou at my right hand” (*šēb limini*).

²² Balthasar, *Apokalypse*, 1:60.

²³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols. (Stuttgart, 1856–1861), I/8:71; cf. I/8:167–68 and I/8:181–82. While this particular statement comes from 1811, Schelling first started reading Hamann (at the latest) in 1808, having received a collection of his writings on loan from Jacobi; see John Betz, “Reading Sibylline Leaves: J. G. Hamann in the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70 (2009): 93–118, esp. 103–109.

²⁴ It should be noted that these lectures were originally published without Schelling’s (or his son’s) permission by his bitter rival, Paulus, and therefore cannot be considered reliable. For a first-hand account of this affair, see Johann Eduard Erdmann’s *Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Darstellung der neueren Philosophie*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1853). For the original transcription of the lectures, see F. W. J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 2 vols. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1992). For Schelling’s understanding of kenosis insofar as it relates to the immanent Trinity, see, for example, 52–55, in which a kenosis is attributed to the Father, the first potency, who “disappears,” so to speak, in ceding his subjectivity, his “being for himself,” to the Son, the second potency. Indeed, as Schelling

Not surprisingly, given his stature, Schelling in turn became an important conduit of modern kenoticism, leading via the Lutheran theologians of the Erlangen school, such as Gottfried Thomasius²⁵ and (perhaps more indirectly) Johannes von Hofmann,²⁶ to the work of celebrated British divines such as Charles Gore, A. M. Fairbairn, H. R. Mackintosh, and Frank Weston.²⁷ As David Law observes, citing G. L. Bauer, Schelling “provides ‘the immediate link to the doctrine of kenosis’ and ‘the metaphysical basis for the application of kenosis to the concept of a personal God.’”²⁸ But Schelling was not merely an indirect influence on the development of British theology (not to mention Coleridge); he was also a major influence on Solovyov and Bulgakov, who in turn exercised a powerful influence on Balthasar.

Needless to say, the point of the foregoing has not been to give an exhaustive account of modern kenoticism, but simply to indicate, firstly, that Balthasar’s doctrine of kenosis was informed by a longstanding tradition of philosophical and theological reflection on this biblical trope, which he did not think could be ignored, and, secondly, that he was by no means an unqualified assimilator of this tradition, as his vigorous contending with Hegel—and his reservations regarding certain aspects of Bulgakov’s theology—shows.²⁹

puts it, the Father is no longer himself. But in begetting the Son, the Father is also “liberated” from anything accidental in his nature and eternally established. In this sense, the Father in giving up himself to the Son is not changed, but is who he is (Exod 3:14).

²⁵ See David R. Law, “Gottfried Thomasius,” in *The Student’s Companion to the Theologians*, ed. Ian S. Markham (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 326–37.

²⁶ See Matthew Becker’s excellent study of Johannes von Hofmann, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

²⁷ See David Law’s excellent treatment of Schelling in *Kierkegaard’s Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 140–53. For a brief history of kenosis in Protestant theology, see Paul Althaus’s entry in the third edition (1959) of *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [RGG], ed. Kurt Galling, 3:1243–44. See Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Die neuere Protestantische Kenosislehre* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1917), 159, 162.

²⁸ Law, *Kierkegaard’s Kenotic Christology*, 140.

²⁹ For Balthasar’s vigorous contesting of Hegel’s form of kenoticism, see, again, Cyril O’Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, vol. 1. For his qualified appropriation, see Jennifer Newsome Martin, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Critical Appropriation of Russian Religious Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).

The Question of Balthasar's Kenotic Theology

Looking back on this brief history, we can now better see where, from a Thomistic, standpoint, Balthasar's doctrine of kenosis becomes problematic: it is not that Balthasar, like Hamann, affirms the humility of the Trinity's works *ad extra*. It is that he draws the conclusion that Hamann's meditations on creation and the economy of salvation implied, namely, that God is humble in himself (*secundum quod Deus*) and that it is therefore right to ascribe humility to the divine nature. But it is not simply that Balthasar *adds* humility to a ready-made list of divine attributes, however unthinkable this may already be from a classical philosophical standpoint. More problematically, he infers from the Son's self-sacrifice an eternal kenosis *within* the immanent Trinity as its transcendental condition—ultimately finding the archetype for the Son's kenosis in the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, thereby making kenosis *constitutive* of God himself. As he strikingly puts it: “[God] *cannot be God in any other way but in this ‘kenosis’ within the Godhead itself.*”³⁰ All of which raises the obvious and legitimate question: has Balthasar gone too far?

From a traditional Thomistic standpoint, certainly, Balthasar's theology could very well look like a transgression of faith in the direction of German idealism, and even of Hegel's speculative Good Friday.³¹ For example, not only is he aligned with Kant at the level of method inasmuch as he infers an eternal kenosis as the “transcendental condition of the possibility” of Christ's own (which makes the oft-cited remark of his methodological preference for Goethe over Kant an oversimplification); he is also remarkably close to Hegel inasmuch as, for both of them, kenosis is *constitutive* of the divine nature (albeit with the all-important caveat that, for Hegel, the divine nature is not always already constituted in eternity, in which state God does not really “exist,” but rather through God's self-emptying into the world process).

Of course, in the thick of any engagement, especially when the clashing is most intense, the sides can become blurred, to the point that one can no longer distinguish them. By the same token, Balthasar can look like Hegel even and precisely in the midst of opposing him. Indeed, not only can an antidote look like the poison it is mean to counteract; it might very well, and typically does, contain an innocuous amount of the poison itself. But legitimate questions nevertheless remain. For example, who has been

³⁰ Balthasar, TD IV, 325 (my emphasis).

³¹ For a strong critique of Balthasar (and other modern theologians) along these lines, see Bruce Marshall, “The Absolute and the Trinity,” *Pro Ecclesia* 23 (2014): 147–64.

drawn into the orbit of whom? Which *Geist* has more gravitational pull? Has German idealism been redeemed, or has Christianity been turned into German idealism? Has water been turned into wine, or has wine been turned into water? The answer to these questions depends upon how one answers another question, or series of questions: What does one make of the phenomenal kenosis (and humility) of the Son of God? Is it merely a contingency of the economy of salvation? Is it merely an instrument of which God once made use, the way one uses a hammer that has no intrinsic connection to the person using it? Or does it say something about the nature of God in himself?

For Balthasar, as we have seen, the Son's kenosis is not simply an external fact of redemption; it does not simply tell us how God *happened* to save the human race, which he might have saved differently. Nor, as significant as this in itself would be, is it merely the pattern laid down for the whole of the Christian life: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at [cf. Gen 3:7], but emptied himself" (Phil 2:5–7).³² For Balthasar, this same kenosis is also an *apocalypse* in the most literal sense of the word—an unveiling not only of the Son's eternal obedience to the Father, but also of the nature of the Father who is revealed in his Son. Nor is this revelation partial; on the contrary, the revelation is as complete as the kenosis. As Christ himself says on the Cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Obviously, these words refer primarily to salvation, specifically, to the conclusion of the definitive Passover by which the redemption of humanity is accomplished. But, following Balthasar, they admit of yet another significance, for in some sense there is really nothing more to see of God than has been given to see in Christ. For *all* has now been revealed: not only God's love and will for creation in Christ (Eph 1:3–14), but the very *nature* of the Father, who has *at last* been completely and perfectly revealed in his Son—who is not just any Word, but *the* Word, and not just any image, but *the* Image and "exact imprint" of his being (Heb 1:1–3). As Christ himself

³² No one is more emphatic about this than Thomas à Kempis. In the words of Christ, as he imaginatively communicated them in *Imitation of Christ* 3.13: "I became the most meek and least of men that you might learn to conquer your pride by following the example of My humility." Indeed, he says, "You will make no progress in the interior life until you regard yourself as lower than everyone else" (2.2). See *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. and ed. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Vintage, 1998), 95 and 50. The inestimable importance of this book for the (making of the) saints of the modern period, from Ignatius to Thérèse of Lisieux, goes without saying.

unambiguously declares: "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). But where is Christ more visible than on the Cross, where he is lifted up for all to see (John 3:14)? As John later says, in reference to Zechariah 12:10: "They will look on him whom they have pierced" (John 19:37). In other words, according to the logic of John's Gospel, the Father is supremely *visible*, not supremely hidden, in the sacrifice of his Son—as is evident in that the evangelist transitions directly from the lifting up of the Son (3:14), who is eternal life to all who believe in him (v. 15), to the heart of the Father who so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son (v. 16).³³

But if to see Christ is to see the Father, and if the Cross is where the Father is supremely visible, and if the Son does nothing but what the Father does in giving himself away, then, seeing Christ as the mirror of the Father's love, we have every reason to *speculate* with Balthasar that the Son's self-depletion (in time) is a mimetic revelation of the Father who eternally gives his Son *all* that he has and *all* that he is—not simply sharing what is his (as if *homoousios* meant nothing more than a sharing of what is held in common), but sharing himself *to the point* that He does not "ex-ist," so to speak, except in his Son, in whom, however, he fully exists and appears.³⁴ But, rounding out Balthasar's Trinitarian theology, we can say still more. For, as the Gospel reveals, the Son's kenosis is from beginning (incarnation) to end (crucifixion) a performance in the *Spirit*, whose gift of life is totally—eucharistically—returned to the Father (John 19:30).³⁵ Accordingly, for Balthasar, the Son's kenosis on the Cross is not

³³ Granted, apart from faith the one who is supremely visible is supremely hidden, more hidden, in fact, than ever before, having apparently abandoned his Son on the Cross. And so one could venture to say that it is the light *of the Father* (cf. Jas 1:17), which shines in the darkness—specifically, from the darkness of the Cross—that is not understood (John 1:5). Whence Paul, too, speaks of the glory of God, the Father, shining in the face of Christ, but out of darkness as the dawning of the light of the new creation: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

³⁴ To be sure, as a matter of patristic theological grammar, we say that the Father would not be the Father were it not for the Son—and we then go on to say that the Father does not exist prior to his generation of the Son, which is an eternal generation. But, following Balthasar, we have even more reason for underscoring the consubstantiality and unity of the Trinity if we understand the Son as not only the Father's Word and Image, but as his very Ex-istence.

³⁵ Following Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., we might even go beyond Balthasar (who speaks of a "trinitarian inversion" whereby the Son, through whom the Spirit is said to proceed, is now the one who is passively sent by the Spirit) and say that

just an instrument of salvation; nor does it merely show us the meaning of spiritual life as a life of thanksgiving to the Father to the end; nor is it merely a representation of the Trinity than which none greater could be imagined. No, as far as this world is concerned, it is for Balthasar the supreme apocalypse of that total gift and total return of self that is the dynamic structure of eternal life, in which the Son exists only in and for the Father who exists only in and for Him.

Needless to say, Balthasar's is a dramatic and speculatively daring theology. But if theology is an attempt to understand revelation—and if understanding is not excluded from faith, but one of its fruits, indeed, a gift of the Spirit—then Balthasar's logic as a *theo*-logic would seem compelling. For if Christ solemnly says that he does nothing except what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), indeed, that in seeing him we see *the Father* (John 14:9), how can his self-emptying *not* reveal something about the Father?³⁶ Following Balthasar, we could put it even more strongly: not to see any analogical (or stricter) connection between what the Word does in his supreme gift of himself and what the Father does or who the Father *is* (for here being and act are one) would be to deny that the Son is the Son *of the Father*, indeed, to separate the Father from the Son—and so to undermine not only the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, but the very meaning of revelation.

Such reasoning, which magnifies the humility of God and refuses to reduce it to an accident of the economy of salvation, has over the past decades been remarkably persuasive, so much so that Balthasar has come to enjoy the official approbation of the Church's magisterium—when one considers John Paul II's naming him a cardinal before his death and Benedict XVI's co-founding, with Balthasar and Henri De Lubac, of the international Catholic journal *Communio*.³⁷ Indeed, the election of

what Christ does in time, in giving back the Spirit of Life to the Father, is an economic representation of the eternal Eucharist whereby he breathes back to the Father the Spirit of love in whom he is eternally begotten. For Balthasar's discussion of "Trinitarian inversion," see TD IV, 364–65. See Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995).

³⁶ See Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44–45: "Christ's humanity is an appropriate expression of the divinity. . . . The obedience of Christ [is] the supreme manifestation of the divine being. . . . The whole being of the Son is there to express and represent the Father."

³⁷ See, for example, John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, §93: "The chief purpose of theology is to provide an understanding of Revelation and the content of faith. The very heart of theological enquiry will thus be the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God. The approach to this mystery begins with reflection upon the mystery of the

Benedict XVI in 2005 could be said to have marked a shift away from the older dogmatics, which gave pride of place to Thomas, and a vindication of the *ressourcement* theologians, who once suffered censorship at the hands of the Thomists. By the same token, if one considers the range of figures included in Balthasar's *Glory of the Lord*, it could be said to have signaled a shift toward a more polyphonic conception of Catholic theology as universal enough to admit not just a renewed appreciation of the Church fathers (Irenaeus, Maximus, et al.), but even an appreciation for figures outside the Catholic Church such as the Lutheran author Hamann or the Orthodox philosopher Solovyev, both of whom are included as lay witnesses in the third volume of the *Glory of the Lord*.³⁸

Thomistic Criticism

Understandably, however, the Thomists have not observed this development in silence, but have challenged Balthasar's theology on a number of grounds, especially his understanding of an intra-divine kenosis. Simply put, they worry that Balthasar has introduced categories into the divine nature (faith, humility, dialogue, obedience, suffering, sacrifice, and even a kind of "death") that do not belong there—categories that may very well be said of Christ's *human* nature, contingently assumed for the purposes of our salvation, but not of his eternal *divine* nature. Of course, Balthasar is

Incarnation of the Son of God: his coming as man, his going to his Passion and Death, a mystery issuing into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the Father, whence he would send the Spirit of truth to bring his Church to birth and give her growth. *From this vantage-point, the prime commitment of theology is seen to be the understanding of God's kenosis, a grand and mysterious truth for the human mind, which finds it inconceivable that suffering and death can express a love which gives itself and seeks nothing in return*" (my emphasis). See also Ratzinger's homily at the funeral liturgy for Balthasar: "No longer only private individuals, but the Church itself, in its official responsibility, tells us that he is right in what he teaches of the Faith, that he points the way to the sources of living water—a witness to the word which teaches us Christ and which teaches us how to live"; see Joseph Ratzinger, "Homily at the Funeral Liturgy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David L. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991). My thanks to Nick Healy for these references.

³⁸ For more on Balthasar's method, see Cyril O'Regan, "Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology," *Gregorianum* 77, no. 2 (1996): 227–60. That this has precedent in the tradition goes without saying, being based upon the famous principle of Irenaeus concerning the *logos spermatikos* or *sperma tou logou*, i.e., the seeds of the Logos scattered abroad, which the Christian, inspired by Christ, can subsequently recognize as belonging to him as, at least, partial revelations that one can in good faith gather up in his honor and to his glory.

too good a theologian not to make a number of important qualifications, as even Mansini recognizes. In the fourth volume of his *Theo-Drama*, for instance, Balthasar explicitly rejects all “fashionable talk of the ‘pain of God,’”³⁹ and readily wards off any suggestion that divine kenosis entails a change in God’s nature, much less a theogony whereby God becomes God in and through a tragic world process.⁴⁰ But such qualifications have not satisfied his Thomist critics. With regard to the question of change in God, Mansini writes: “It is hard to see how the invocation of a change in God unlike that which we find in our earthly experience . . . can be anything more than words.”⁴¹ Similarly, Brotherton observes, “Balthasar wants to trace [the suffering of God due to evil] back to a *primordial* ‘wound’ of sorts constituting the very being of God as triune.”⁴² Whence he concludes that Balthasar “ends up making God the primary analogate in the analogy of suffering, effectively subsuming the immanent dimension of the Trinity under the economic dimension of the Trinity in a manner differing on the surface little from Moltmann’s theology.”⁴³

To his credit, Brotherton recognizes that things might “on the surface” seem worse than they are, and that if Balthasar speaks of a “wound” in the divine nature, it is not a wound *per se*, but only a wound “of sorts,” namely, a “wound” of love by which the Father is “touched” by the Son’s willingness to give himself up for the sake of the world’s redemption. It is evident, in other words, that Balthasar is speaking metaphorically, and perhaps never so much as when he speaks of the Father’s generation of the Son as a kind of “death.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, for Brotherton, following Kevin Duffy, no amount of scare quotes—or what he and Duffy call the “metaphor defense”—is enough to save Balthasar’s theology from (at the very least) incoherence. For what we see in Balthasar, in their view, is at the end of the day “an undifferentiated amalgam of metaphor and analogy,” whereby

³⁹ Balthasar, TD IV, 327.

⁴⁰ Balthasar, TD IV, 324: “We cannot entertain any form of ‘process theology’ that identifies the world process (including God’s involvement in it, even to the extent of the Cross) with the eternal and timeless ‘procession of the Hypostases in God.” As O’Regan has shown, Balthasar is far too wary of Hegel (and Moltmann, for that matter) to be accused of making the immanent Trinity in some sense dependent upon its economic manifestation; see *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, vol. 1, *Hegel* (New York: Crossroad, 2014).

⁴¹ See Guy Mansini, “Balthasar and the Theological Enrichment of the Trinity,” *The Thomist* 64 (October, 2000): 518.

⁴² Brotherton, “God’s Relation to Evil,” 193.

⁴³ Brotherton, “God’s Relation to Evil,” 197.

⁴⁴ Balthasar, TD V, 84.

“literal assertions such as ‘There is super-change in God’ are accorded a quasi-metaphorical status that they [strictly speaking] do not possess.”⁴⁵

To be sure, for Brotherton and other critics, such conclusions do not rule out a measure of appreciation for Balthasar’s project.⁴⁶ They might concede, for instance, that Balthasar was facing a crisis of unbelief the likes of which Christian Europe had never seen, and that this called for a more dramatic response than Thomism alone could provide. They might appreciate, too, his reversal of the order of Kant’s three critiques, seeing therein a genuinely Thomistic insight that faith is not given to us in abstraction from sensible experience, but precisely in and through it (Rom 10:17; 1 John 1:1). They might even admire him as a *chef d’orchestre*, who called upon the *full* resources of the Church, including a wide variety of Christian poets, saints, and theologians, hoping to persuade his audience more by the dramatic beauty of truth—that is, by the kenotic glory of love—than by truth logically proposed. Yet the verdict remains. However appealing Balthasar’s theological *aesthetics* may be to a modern audience used to the theater and impatient with arguments, it comes at too high a price: the confusion of salvific realities with divine realities and the mythologizing of theology. In Brotherton’s moderate judgment (compared to Mansini): “I do not argue that Balthasar’s conclusions are dogmatically heterodox, but that they are theologically questionable and in need of a particular ‘demythologization.’”⁴⁷ In view of such a verdict, is there any room for an appeal? Dare we hope that Balthasar’s theology can be “saved” and reconciled with that of Thomas?

In response to the concerns of Balthasar’s critics, let us first remember what Cyril O’Regan has shown and is beyond dispute: that however close Balthasar may appear to stand to Hegel, his entire theology is in fact a dramatic attempt to inoculate Catholic theology against his influence. Granted, Balthasar also understands God to be constituted in and through a divine kenosis; indeed, as we have seen, for Balthasar God “cannot be God in any other way but in this ‘kenosis’ within the Godhead itself.”⁴⁸ Therein, we might say, lies the greatest similarity between him and the Swabian *Geist*. But, *nota bene*, this is *toto caelo* different from saying what

⁴⁵ See Kevin Duffy, “Change, Suffering, and Surprise in God: Von Balthasar’s Use of Metaphor,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76 (2011): 370–87.

⁴⁶ Brotherton, for example, speaks of Balthasar’s “valiant efforts” vis-à-vis Hegel to preserve the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity, even if he does not think that he is ultimately successful (“Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity,” 200).

⁴⁷ Brotherton, “Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity,” 200–34.

⁴⁸ TD IV, 325 (my emphasis).

Hegel says, namely, that God would not be God without his kenosis and self-recuperation *in and through the world process*. Therein lies the “greater dissimilarity” between them: for Balthasar, the difference between Creator and creature is never erased, not even in Christ, who is the perfect union of the *two*.

If this last point is to be appreciated, however, we need to underscore Balthasar’s implicitly *Thomistic* commitment to the *analogia entis* as he inherited it from Przywara.⁴⁹ For once we do, it becomes apparent that Balthasar is, in fact, much closer to Thomas than many of his critics realize. It also mitigates considerably their concern that he carelessly introduces human concepts such as suffering into the divine nature, since the *analogia entis* rules out any confusion of Creator and creation, and any linear attribution of human concepts to the divine nature, from the start. Admittedly, this metaphysical commitment gets obscured as Balthasar’s theo-drama unfolds, for the point is the drama itself, not the staging, and that the audience be moved to an appropriately mimetic response. But the *analogia entis* is nevertheless the metaphysical scaffolding upon which the entire performance depends.

⁴⁹ See James Zeitz, “Przywara and von Balthasar on Analogy,” *The Thomist* 52 (1988): 473–98. Of course, the *analogia entis* as a Thomistic (or Catholic) doctrine has been the subject of much controversy—not just on the ecumenical front, but among Thomists themselves. Herbert McCabe, for example, argued that, according to Aquinas, “analogy is not a way of getting to know about God, nor is it a theory of the structure of the universe, it is a comment on our use of certain words” (McCabe’s commentary in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 3, *Knowing and Naming God* [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964], 106). A similar position was taken by Ralph McInerny. See McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961), *Studies in Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), and *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 152–53. For a more traditional view, see, *inter alia*: Joseph Owens, “Analogy as a Thomistic Approach to Being,” *Medieval Studies* 24 (1962): 303–22; John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2000), 146–47; Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 136; and, more recently, Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). In what follows I take for granted that the traditional view of the matter is correct, and that the *analogia entis* is an entailment of Thomas’s metaphysics and, specifically, his understanding of the real distinction. For a defense of this position, see the introduction to Przywara’s *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 40–41; all English translations from Przywara are my own.

In the next section it will therefore be important to review, firstly, the nature of the *analogia entis* as Przywara understood it (this will help to clarify the role of metaphor and analogy in Balthasar's theology), and secondly, the entailments of the *analogia entis* with regard to apophaticism and divine simplicity. For once we do, it becomes evident that Balthasar is actually far more indebted to Thomas—and that there is more common ground between them—than meets the eye.⁵⁰ It will also become evident that Thomas's understanding of divine simplicity is more capacious than meets the eye—so capacious, in fact, that positions which at first seemed contradictory might in divine simplicity be reconciled. Indeed, I would dare to suggest that, the better we understand Balthasar, the closer we come to Thomas, and that the better we understand the *whole* Thomas, the closer we come to Balthasar as well.⁵¹

The *Analogia Entis* and Trinitarian Doctrine

As we have already seen, one of the chief charges made against Balthasar is that—going beyond the orthodox ascription of faith, obedience, suffering, and death to the *hypostatic* experience of the incarnate Son—he has introduced these realities into the divine *nature* as well, making God in his eternal nature the primary analogate of these terms (e.g., the Father's kenotic begetting of the Son is the archetype of every sacrifice and sacrificial death, the Son's eternal fidelity to the Father is the archetype of all faith, and so forth). All of which amounts to the charge that Balthasar fails to observe the *metaphysical* difference between Being and becoming, between the immutable Creator and the mutable creature, and the corresponding *epistemic* humility that this difference would seem to require, presuming instead, as Karen Kilby has charged, something like an “insider's view” of the workings of the immanent Trinity.⁵² We are thus faced with a

⁵⁰ See Jim Buckley's groundbreaking essay, “Balthasar's Use of the Theology of Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 59, no. 4 (1995): 517–45, in which he masterfully constructs the dispute between the two theologians, which cannot be established on the basis of any single text or comment of Balthasar, thereby setting the stage for further dialogue. Indeed, pointing the way to reconciliation, Buckley not only shows the common ground between them, examining Balthasar's “persistent and massive use of Aquinas's theology” (538), and noting his praise for Thomas's metaphysical genius (530–31); he also shows (538–39) that Balthasar's criticisms of Thomas do not necessarily stand up to scrutiny, and are, in any event, not as weighty as they might at first appear.

⁵¹ See Erich Przywara, “Thomas von Aquinas als Problematiker,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 109 (June 1925): 188–99.

⁵² See Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), esp. 112–14. See also D. C. Schindler, “A Very Critical Response

rather perverse irony: in the view of Balthasar's critics, the theologian who extolled the glory of divine humility, like none since Hamann, is guilty of presuming to know too much about it.

In response to this charge, the first thing to emphasize in Balthasar's defense is that, according to the terms of the *analogia entis*, as Przywara and Balthasar both understood it, any univocal predication of creaturely terms such as faith, obedience, suffering, and death to God in his eternal nature is out of the question. For what the *analogia entis* at its simplest signifies is what the Fourth Lateran Council stated in 1215 in its edict against the Trinitarian teachings of Joachim of Fiore—that no similarity can be noted between Creator and creature without also noting their greater dissimilarity (“inter creator et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari quin inter eos maior dissimilitudo notanda”).⁵³ In other words, however much one can say about God, even on the sound basis of revelation, ultimately requires an apophatic admission of incomprehension, and a correspondingly humble submission of all human concepts to the God who is “ever greater”—*semper maior*. As Augustine famously says and Przywara never tires of repeating, God is not God if you comprehend [him]—*si comprehendis non est Deus*.⁵⁴

Thus, if we say with Balthasar with regard to the immanent Trinity that the Father's begetting of the Son is a kind of “death,” or that the relation of the Son to the Father is a kind of eternal “fidelity” and “obedience,” we have to remember that we are speaking *analogically*, and that what is said is simultaneously unsaid because we do not, strictly speaking, know what we are saying. In other words, we have to remember that the *analogia entis* is essentially an apophatic qualifier on every cataphatic assertion. And since what is at issue here vis-à-vis Balthasar's critics is precisely Balthasar's understanding of the immanent Trinity, it is all the more important to keep in mind—what Balthasar knew very well—that the *analogia entis* was formulated precisely as a corrective to what the Lateran IV deemed to be Joachim's *overreach* in the matter of *Trinitarian doctrine*.

to Karen Kilby: On Failing to See the Form,” *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 3 (September 2015): 68–87.

⁵³ Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), no. 806. The council, it should be noted, did not coin the term *analogia entis*. Rather, it was Przywara who drew the connection, in order to underscore the apophatic finality of any properly Catholic understanding of analogy.

⁵⁴ Augustine, Sermon 117, ch. 3, no. 5, and Sermon 52, ch. 6, no. 16. We ought underscore here that such humility is to be carefully distinguished from agnosticism, which lacks any kataphatic footing and has no basis in revelation.

To be sure, Balthasar is not Przywara, and one must make allowances for differences in theological style. Przywara was the more apophatic of the two; Balthasar, the more cataphatic. Likewise, Przywara's spirit is more that of a Pseudo-Dionysius or a Carmelite, as one sees from his *Analogia entis* (which gives the final word to the Areopagite), his lifelong love for the Carmelites and translations of their poetry, and the way he reads Augustine and Thomas, always emphasizing with respect to Augustine the God who is "ever greater"—*Deus semper maior*—and, with respect to Thomas, the God who is known as unknown (*Deus tamquam ignotus*). Balthasar's spirit, on the other hand, is more that of a Bonaventure or a Dante, who delights in God's kenotic presence and the polychromatic riches of divine revelation. And these differences in theological style led to occasional tensions between them.⁵⁵ What is important to underscore, however, is that these were tensions within the context of a lifelong friendship, just as tensions between apophatic and cataphatic styles remain tensions within the *one* rhythm of the *analogia entis* as Przywara and Balthasar both understood it. In other words, within the one rhythm of analogy proper to Catholic theology, there is no such thing as a purely apophatic or a purely cataphatic style, but at most differences in emphasis, just as the same symphonic score can be played differently depending upon the sensibility of the conductor.

In this regard let us note, furthermore, that the *analogia entis* subdivides into two basic types of analogy, an *analogia attributionis* and an *analogia proportionalitatis*. While historically these have been understood in different ways, what is important here is how Przywara and Balthasar understood them.⁵⁶ Whereas the former type of analogy emphasizes the similarity of creatures to God according to an analogy of intrinsic attribution (whereby God is the archetype and cause of the goodness that is not merely said of creatures extrinsically, but said of them *really* inasmuch as God himself is the cause of the goodness in them), the latter type of analogy emphasizes the dissimilarity between God and creatures, not according to a direct proportion (an *analogia proportionis*), but according to an indirect relation of relations: whereby the *non-identity* of essence and existence in creatures is related to the *identity* of essence and existence in

⁵⁵ For example, at one point in the vol. 3 of *Theo-Drama* [TD III], Balthasar suggests that Przywara is *too* apophatic and that this prevented him from writing a Christology. It should be noted, however, that this is a somewhat unfair characterization, since Przywara did produce a Christology in the form of his commentary on John's Gospel, one in which the *analogia entis* is finally disclosed as an *analogia caritatis*.

⁵⁶ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, no. 6; Balthasar, TD III; and footnote 52.

God. With the latter, in other words, comes the abyssal difference between Being and becoming: between what it means to *be* God, and what it means to “be” a creature.

Accordingly, whatever Balthasar ascribes to the immanent Trinity on the basis of revelation—as when he speaks of the Son’s eternal obedience, or even of the Father’s self-sacrifice and “death”—is ascribed not directly, but according to the *analogia entis*. In other words, it is necessarily qualified by the analogical difference between the being of God and the being of creatures, which explains his frequent caveats, qualifications, and deliberate use of scare quotes. Of course, one can choose to read Balthasar’s caveats as nothing but words; and when Balthasar attempts to say that God’s joy is not changed but “increased” by the redemption of creation, one can construe this to mean that, for Balthasar, God is not perfect in himself, but admits of change, growth, and increase. And one can then go on to say that, for Balthasar, God would therefore not be *fully* God without the world. But is this really fair to Balthasar given everything else we know?⁵⁷ I would submit that it is a valid criticism *only* if one disregards what we have just established: that his theology is governed by his unwavering commitment to the *analogia entis*.⁵⁸

Having just stressed the apophatic entailment of the *analogia entis*, even and precisely in the midst of Balthasar’s more cataphatic theology, let us now spell out another entailment of the *analogia entis*, or conversely, its metaphysical foundation, namely, the doctrine of divine simplicity.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Mansini, “Balthasar and the Theo-dramatic Enrichment of the Trinity,” 518.

⁵⁸ As he puts it in the preface to his *Theo-Logic*, considering now the whole of his trilogy: “From the first to the last the trilogy is keyed to the transcendental qualities of being, in particular to the analogy between their status and form in creaturely being, on the one hand, and in Divine Being, on the other” (see *Theo-Logic*, vol. 1, *The Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], 1).

⁵⁹ The doctrine of divine simplicity, let us note, has been much disputed in recent years. Some see it as a metaphysical appendix that is no longer needed in the body of theology; others question whether it can be reconciled with divine freedom or the obvious problem of affirming a Trinity of persons. See, for instance: Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 47; Ryan T. Mullins, “Simply Impossible: A Case Against Divine Simplicity,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 181–203. While this is not the place to respond to these objections, it seems to me that they are predicated upon either misunderstandings of the doctrine of simplicity or a lack of imagination with regard to what is, at the end of the day, a mystical teaching. For an excellent discussion, see Thomas H. McCall, “Trinity Doctrine Plain and Simple,” in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014). For a

Since this is a doctrine to which Balthasar is either implicitly or explicitly committed, it should go a long way toward alleviating concerns of his critics that his theology separates the persons of the Trinity, raising suspicions of tritheism.⁶⁰ It will also bring us a step closer to seeing the positive (and not just regulative) relevance of the *analogia entis* (or this particular entailment of it) to Trinitarian theology.

As is well-known, the doctrine of divine simplicity means that any number of things that are really distinct in creatures are not really so in God. Most basically, following Thomas, it means that God as Spirit is not composed of parts, and that one would therefore err if one were to conceive of the Trinity in such terms (however unavoidable it may be at the level of *dianoetic* conception). It also means that God is *pure actuality*, having therefore no admixture of potentiality, whereas creatures are a mixture, so to speak, of potentiality and actuality. The distinction most basic to creatures qua creatures, however, even to angels, is that between essence and existence; and it is this that is at issue here. For while the *analogia entis* implies an analogy between pure actuality in God and a composition of act and potency in creatures, it turns on the analogy between an identity of essence and existence in God and a real distinction of essence and existence

well-known attempt to defend the coherence of traditional Trinitarian doctrine from an analytic standpoint, see Michael Rea's article in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ See Gerard F. O'Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 146–47. O'Hanlon admits that Balthasar's understanding of simplicity is more dynamic, but nevertheless shows his commitment to it. For an account of Balthasar's *Thomistic* understanding of divine simplicity both as it qualifies his reception of Bulgakov and defuses criticisms of his theology, such as that of Alyssa Pitstick, see Katy Leamy, *The Holy Trinity: Hans Urs von Balthasar and his Sources* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015). As Leamy rightly concludes, "Balthasar's Trinitarian theology maintains the fullness of Divine Simplicity while positing the completeness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, particularly in his suffering and death. He is able to do this, not by positing an additional concept (Sophia) that somehow 'bridges' the distance between God and creation, but rather by following a Thomistic understanding of relation, where the single Act that constitutes the Divine Essence is the basis both for absolute unity and infinite difference, and then by extending this notion of relation analogously to the Creator/creature relationship" (76). Likewise, with regard to Pitstick's polemical monograph, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs Von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of the Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, MI, 2007), Leamy shows that Pitstick's charges rest upon a misunderstanding of the *paradoxical* nature of divine simplicity. This is an important point to which I will return presently.

in creatures. But if this is so, if what is meant by divine simplicity is, most precisely, that God alone is an identity of essence and existence, and that this identity belongs exclusively to him who can say “I am who [or what] I am,” what else might this mean—and what might it mean for Trinitarian theology?

Needless to say, the *analogia entis* is a phrase that can be reduced to a slogan, however rich its signification, but if we are to understand its entailments, especially for Trinitarian theology, we need to pause here and appreciate the mystery to which it points. For what it says is that what finite minds cannot by any stretch of the imagination unite—essence and existence—are identical in God. But if this is so, then God might very well also comprise in his unique simplicity other characteristics that finite minds, inasmuch as they operate at the level of *dianoia* and not spiritual *noesis*, cannot reconcile. Take, for example, the apparent opposites of justice and mercy: we hold as a matter of revelation that God is both just and merciful, indeed, that his righteousness is revealed precisely in the gospel of the forgiveness of sins (Rom 1:17), even though we cannot fathom how this could be so—how in God justice and mercy are unfathomably one. But if this is so, we are only a step away from seeing what the Gospel begs us to consider: that God in his eternal nature is precisely what we see in Jesus Christ, an inscrutable identity not just of justice and mercy, but also of strength and weakness, majesty and humility, glory and kenosis. For the same Jesus Christ who in his forgiveness of sins is the righteousness of God is also, in his kenosis, the glory of God; indeed, the scandalous impotence of his Cross is the royal seat of his power, from which he draws and subjects all things to himself (cf. John 12:32).

The Heart of the Matter: The Question of Divine Humility

Now, as we have seen, Thomas seems to have doubted this possibility, because he did not believe that God could by nature be humble. Obviously, he believed that Christ was humble, as Scripture attests, and poignantly comments on the fact in any number of places.⁶¹ (It should also be underscored that Thomas understood humility to be a virtue—which is no small thing when one considers that the ancients did not regard it as such.) But he did not draw from this the inference that the Son of God, by nature, is humble. For, he reasoned, while humility is fitting for creatures—and for Christ insofar as Christ had to show creatures how to be creatures—it

⁶¹ See, for instance, his beautiful *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Fabian Larcher, O.P. and James A. Weisheipl, O.P., with an introduction and notes by Daniel Keating and Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2010).

would be an imperfection in the divine nature, in God qua God. As he puts it in a passage that Mansini has cited as evidence against Balthasar's theology:

A thing is said to be perfect in two ways. First absolutely; such a thing contains no defect, neither in its nature nor in respect of anything else, and thus God alone is perfect. To Him humility is fitting, not as regards His Divine nature, but only as regards His assumed nature. Secondly, a thing may be said to be perfect in a restricted sense, for instance in respect of its nature or state or time. Thus a virtuous man is perfect: although in comparison with God his perfection is found wanting, according to the word of Isaiah 40:17, "All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all." On this way humility may be competent to every man.⁶²

Clearly for Thomas humility is right and just in the case of imperfect creatures, who are like nothing before God. But, Thomas reasonably asks, how could humility be admitted in God's case, since God is perfect and the one before whom all others must bow? Before whom, after all, would God need to be humble? Hence his conclusion: "Humility cannot befit God, who has no superior, but is above all."⁶³ Furthermore, Thomas observes, humility implies the distance between a lord and his subject; if humility were admitted in God, it would therefore imply disproportion *in God*, which is inconceivable—as though there could be anything in God to which God himself could be subject. Thus, Thomas not unreasonably concludes, humility in God would be a sign of defect, not perfection; weakness, not strength; impotence, not omnipotence. Moreover, to admit humility into the divine nature would be to open the floodgates to other imperfections such as vulnerability and suffering. And before you know it one will have denied that God in his divine nature is impassible, leading to the shipwreck of Christian theology.

Such concerns should not be dismissed out of hand—least of all the

⁶² Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 161, a. 1, ad 4.

⁶³ *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, ch. 15: "Though the virtue of humility cannot attach to Christ in His divine nature; it may attach to Him in His human nature and His divinity renders His humility all the more praiseworthy, for the dignity of the person adds to the merit of humility; and there can be no greater dignity to a man than his being God. Hence the highest praise attaches to the humility of the Man God, who to wean men's hearts from worldly glory to the love of divine glory, chose to embrace a death of no ordinary sort, but a death of the deepest ignominy."

concern about divine impassibility.⁶⁴ For they do justice (in a good way) to the God of the philosophers.⁶⁵ The question, however, is not whether Thomas does justice to the God of the philosophers, but whether in this particular point he does justice to the God of revelation. To be sure, there is none before whom God must be humble, and so, philosophically speaking, there is no need for it. But, of course, neither is there any philosophical necessity for love, and by the same logic one could say it is proper for creatures to love God, but not for God to love creatures—they are, after all, less loveable than himself. Indeed, from an Aristotelian standpoint, to love them would be beneath him. But, obviously, revelation teaches us differently, raising the question of whether here, too, but now with respect to the question of humility, the God of the philosophers stands in need of theological revision according to the principles of Thomism itself—to wit, that faith does not destroy but presupposes and *perfects* reason (*fides non destruit sed supponit et perficit rationem*).

One must also consider that Thomas's conclusions about humility strike a discordant note within the larger tradition. In Athanasius, for example, humility is not simply an attribute of Christ's human nature, but "belongs to the divine nature directly."⁶⁶ For Augustine, who speaks freely of "a humble God,"⁶⁷ it is nothing less than the sign of the true religion.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ But that is not even what is at issue here, because Balthasar, too, affirms divine impassibility, even and precisely when he seems to deny it. For God's suffering on our behalf in Christ is not a wounding of God's nature, as though it effected some kind of change therein, but rather its apocalypse, an expression of the fact that God, according to his essence, is love, which nothing, not even sin and the utmost defiance of creation, changes.

⁶⁵ Indeed, Catholic theology owes a debt of gratitude to the philosophers for preserving theology from mythology, and ensuring that the Gospel of the one and true Logos incarnate in Christ does not become, however inadvertently, a Mytho-Logos. See, in this regard, Matthew Levering's important work *Scripture and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and Reinhard Hütter's review in *Pro Ecclesia* 14, no. 1 (2005): 108–10. See also Hütter, "The Directedness of Reasoning and the Metaphysics of Creation," in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith*, ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hütter (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 160–93.

⁶⁶ See Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 119. One of the most striking aspects of Anatolios's study is how it draws out and underscores the theme of divine humility in the Church Fathers—almost as if the development of Trinitarian doctrine were essentially about this one mystery of divine self-abasement, which Arius and Eunomius et al. could not fathom.

⁶⁷ Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus* 4.8 [On Catechizing the Uninstructed].

⁶⁸ The most obvious example of this is what Augustine says in books 6 and 7 of the *Confessions* about the Platonists and the Manichees, who in their pride cannot

And then there are modern saints of the Eastern Church, such as Silouan and Elder Sophrony, who speak not with words alone, but with tears shed from experience, of the humility of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ All of which *strongly* suggests that there is more to humility (and poverty and meekness) than meets the eye, and that it possess a greater range of significance (from the human to the divine) than Thomas in his pre-visionary writings was prepared to admit.⁷⁰

Thus far, however, the Thomists have not been persuaded. On the contrary, in the name of good distinctions, they see humility as a contingency of salvation and a quality that God would not otherwise possess. But this, in turn, raises a number of serious problems, because it amounts to saying that God is only *apparently* humble and that in himself he is not. And then, before you know it, we have severed the bond between the immanent and economic Trinity, and revelation no longer means revelation. But could this be? Must we not rather, following Balthasar, posit something in the immanent Trinity, something like the humility we see in Christ, that is the transcendental condition for the possibility of so dramatic a revelation? Can we really say that Christ's humility reveals nothing about his divinity—about God in himself? Could humility be so prized by the saints, and so characteristic of the Mother of God, her virtue par excellence, as it were, were it not reflective of the *nature* of her Son,

see the humility of God, whether in Christ or in Scripture. See Brian Daley, "A Humble Mediator: The Distinctive Elements in St. Augustine's Christology," *Word and Spirit* 9 (1987): 100–17.

⁶⁹ See Archimandrite Sophrony, *Saint Silouan, the Athonite* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1999), 43: "What was the essence of God's prescription to Father Silouan [viz. Keep thy mind in hell and despair not]? It was not an abstract, intellectual disclosure but an intimation which existentially revealed to his soul that the root of all sin, the seed of death, is pride: that God is humility, and therefore the man who would 'put on' God must learn to be humble. Now Father Silouan realised that Christ's supreme, ineffably sweet humility, which he had experienced at the time of his vision, is an inseparable feature of Divine love, of Divine Being. Now he really saw that all ascetic striving must be directed towards acquiring humility. Now did his soul triumph—triumph after a fashion ignored by the world. It had been given him to know the great mystery of Being, to know it existentially. O, how gracious is the Lord—He reveals His mysteries to His humble servant and instructs him in the ways of eternal life! Now Silouan will cling with the whole strength of his soul to the path shown him by God Himself." Thanks to Alexis Torrance for help with this citation.

⁷⁰ For instance, as Alexis Torrance has pointed out in conversation, one would do well to distinguish between ascetical humility, as an expression of repentance for sin, and the perfect humility of Christ, who had no sin, but was nevertheless humble.

the nature of God himself, who says, “learn from me; for I am gentle and *humble* in heart” (Matt 11:29)? Is not her glory, like that of her Son, bound up precisely with her humility? My point, in any event, is that Scripture and Tradition give us very good reasons to find Thomas’s answer to this particular question wanting—not to mention other reasons we might have to be troubled by it.⁷¹

So, once again, we see that each side in this debate has legitimate concerns, which we might now summarize as follows. The Thomists are concerned that, if Balthasar’s theology is true, then the God of the philosophers has *de facto* given way to the gods of the poets, and we are no longer talking about *Theo*-drama, but *Theo-drama*; in other words, theology as reasoned discourse about revelation has given way to mythology. For their part, the Balthasarians are concerned that the Thomists are insufficiently attentive to the humble depths of divine love, and to what the economic Trinity reveals about the immanent Trinity—to the point of severing the connection between the immanent and economic Trinity and saying that the nature of God in his self-revelation is one thing and that God in his eternal nature another. Thus, even after showing Balthasar’s Thomistic credentials, we seem to have made no progress. We find ourselves back at our original question: Can Balthasar be reconciled with Thomas? Can a conception of intra-divine kenosis be reconciled with a doctrine of divine perfection and simplicity?

On the face of it, this would seem to be impossible except in the sense already indicated: that the Catholic Church is big enough for both theo-

⁷¹ For instance, do we really believe in a sovereign power in which there is no trace of humility? Can we even imagine such a God, or cling to such a God in love, as the Psalmist, enjoins (Ps 72:28)? To be sure, the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10), and there can be no piety in the absence of reverence. But neither can there be true piety where there is sheer terror, and a God without humility is nothing short of terrifying. Worse, it suggests pride. In their concern to defend divine impassibility, the Thomists charge Balthasar with introducing suffering into the divine nature—though this suffering for Balthasar is nothing other than the voluntary suffering of love, which knows no bounds, descending even to hell, if need be, in order to seek and to save that which is lost (Ps 139). But have the Thomists, inasmuch as they follow Thomas *in this particular point*, not done something worse? Have they not, by stripping God of humility, unwittingly stripped him of (the peculiar form of) his glory? For that matter, in refusing to admit humility have they not unwittingly introduced *pride* into the divine nature, than which nothing more offensive to piety can be conceived? Certainly, one can err by forgetting that God is the omnipotent sovereign and subject to none; but one can also err by forgetting that God is love, and that it is the nature of love to be humble.

logians and cannot itself be reduced to any one—notwithstanding strong recommendations it might sometimes make in favor of one theologian over another. But this amounts at best to an agreement to disagree; and in the name of love it is the task of Catholic theology *qua Catholic* theology always to seek reconciliation even where none seems possible. But what, then, is the way forward?

Curiously enough, the most obvious answer to this question, though it may have fallen beneath our notice, is the very thing in question, namely, humility—and a corresponding willingness on the part of each side to see the other as better than itself (Phil 2:3), or in this case as possessing a wisdom that is conceivably greater than its own. Otherwise, absent humility, there can be no unity, but only strife to the end, which in the context of the Church of reconciliation is insufferable. So we do, after all, have a practical way forward—something we can practice. But, as Thomas himself observes, humility is precious like nard,⁷² and so great a virtue that its lowliness is difficult to attain.⁷³ Theoretically, therefore, the way forward would appear to be simpler; for it consists in nothing more than a simple intuition of the paradoxical nature of divine simplicity, in which majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, like mercy and justice, are inscrutably one.⁷⁴

In the meantime, however, as long as we sojourn in the realm of *dianoia*, where such vision eludes us, and the greatness of lowliness proves too hard to practice, the way forward consists in gradually recognizing that both sides in this dispute not only go together, but in fact need one another—if the Thomists are to fathom the bathos of divine revelation, and the Balthasarians are to avoid inadvertently turning theology into mythology. As Mansini rightly concludes, albeit in a different context: “It’s not just that we *can* have everything, however; today, we *need* to have

⁷² Aquinas, *Super Ioannem* 12, no. 1598.

⁷³ As Meister Eckhart puts it, attempting to explain the exalted nature of this virtue, “humility is a root in the ground of the divinity” (*The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and Bernard McGinn [Manwah, NJ: Paulist, 1981], 190).

⁷⁴ For his part, Brotherton has defined this kind of a view as “paradoxism” and associated it with a kind of “aesthetic excess”: “By ‘paradoxism’ I mean to indicate the tendency to view affirmation of apparent contradiction as a pathway to truth, born of the notion that truth at its profoundest consists in the (at least apparent) truth of contradiction, the most radical *coincidentia oppositorum*” (“Trinitarian Suffering and Divine Receptivity,” 191). This is well said, even if Brotherton seems reluctant to agree with the position he thus describes.

everything.⁷⁵ In other words, what is needed today is not the polemical posing of a choice *between* Thomas and Balthasar (both, after all, are faithful Catholic theologians), but a genuinely Catholic embrace of Thomas *and* Balthasar—precisely in the way that Przywara sought to dynamize the modern Church by advocating Augustine *and* Thomas, Thomas *and* Newman, and so forth.⁷⁶

Let us, then, recognize the *particula veri* of the other. But let us also recognize that doing so is more than a (negative) concession that each has different gifts, for instance, that Thomas is arguably more of a philosopher than a theologian, and Balthasar more of a theologian than a philosopher.⁷⁷ For Thomas and Balthasar were equally and unmistakably committed to the final unity of reason and revelation, philosophy and theology; and so truth and charity oblige us to search for the deeper unity they themselves affirmed.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Guy Mansini, O.S.B., review of *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* by Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Thomist* 73, no. 2 (2009): 341.

⁷⁶ For Przywara's Catholic ecclesiology, and corresponding understanding of theology, see, for instance, his review of the first international conference on Thomas in Rome in *Stimmen der Zeit* 119 (1925): 234–36, in which he advocates a richer, more dynamic, and ultimately more Catholic correlation of Thomas and Augustine. Przywara does not stop with this correlation, however (which could move the Church closer to reconciliation with Augustine's modern progeny in Luther et al.). In his attempt to renew the Church and so renew the world in Christ, he called upon the *full* resources of the Church, including not only the Franciscans and the Jesuits (Przywara could always find a place for Scotus and Suarez), but also Newman, whose works he introduced and edited, and Thérèse of Lisieux, whom he repeatedly commended as a saint for the times (as, ironically, the Church's most powerful response, given in the form of radical humility, to the titanism of Nietzsche, Heidegger, et al.). Among his many tributes to Thérèse, see "Mystik des Nichts," *Stimmen der Zeit* 122 (1932): 223–33, *Heroisch* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1936), and *Crucis Mysterium: Das Christliche Heute* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1939). For his recommendation of Thomas *and* Newman as a united Catholic front, see *Ringten der Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1929). As Brian Daley has pointed out, it is from this union, so to speak, that Lonergan is subsequently born.

⁷⁷ This, at least, was Balthasar's view of Aquinas. See *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 9. As Buckley points out, however, this should not be taken as a criticism. After all, Balthasar admired Thomas's philosophical and, specifically, metaphysical gifts. Indeed, "the vast majority of Balthasar's uses of Aquinas are constructive rather than critical." See Buckley, "Balthasar's Use of the Theology of Aquinas," 518.

⁷⁸ This is obvious enough with regard to Thomas. For Balthasar's stipulation of the importance of philosophical metaphysics, see his *Theo-logic*, vol. 2, *The Truth of God*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 173: "Since the

Erich Przywara: Between Thomas and Balthasar

To this end, I suggest that we now consider what insights Erich Przywara might have to offer as a kind of theological-philosophical mediator between them, and for two good reasons: (1) his immense respect for Thomas as “the teacher,” to whom he dedicated the first collection of his works; and (2) Balthasar’s similarly great respect for Przywara as *his* teacher. In other words, Przywara stands precisely *between* Thomas and Balthasar, and more generally, between neo-Scholasticism and the modern world.⁷⁹

More specifically, let us first consider how Przywara reads Thomas’s understanding of divine power, and whether there is more to it than

question about being as such is the basic question of metaphysics, the theologian cannot get around it. For him, then, there is only one conclusion: he cannot be a theologian *ex professo* without at the same time being a metaphysician, just as, conversely . . . a metaphysics that refused to be theology would thereby misunderstand and repudiate its own object.”

⁷⁹ In this regard Przywara is best understood not as a Scholastic, but (to borrow a phrase from Francesca Murphy) as a leading representative of a “creative Thomism” that wanted to put Thomas in conversation with the modern world—as Joseph Maréchal did vis-a-vis Kant; not, however, in order to accommodate Thomas to the moderns, but rather to show the moderns how Thomas’s thought is still alive, relevant, and able to help modern intellectual life through its own problems. In the main, however, Przywara thinks that the schools are not up to the task. Indeed, he thinks the schools tend to turn Thomas—a dynamic, living, dialogical thinker who was in conversation not only with prior Catholic tradition (Dionysius, Augustine, et al.), but also with Jews and Muslims and the best philosophy of the time—into an ossified and monolithic system of thought. In an article from 1925, for example, “Neue Philosophie: Das Problem von Philosophie Überhaupt,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 109 (1925): 294–95, which could be read as a clarion call for a “creative Thomism,” he asks in reference to the “rubble” of Kantianism, which by the turn of the century had been reduced to aporias, whether the Catholic schools are up to the task of addressing the crisis in philosophy: “Are they vivified by Aquinas’s genuine perspicacity and breadth of vision with regard to the fundamental problems? Or have they exchanged the original expansiveness of the master for the anxious confines of the school? Are they genuinely able to see in the modern movement of philosophical life the emerging of the features of Thomas’s [own thought], or do they bolt their doors all the more securely against the Pentecostal blowing of the Creator Spirit? The times are irretrievably past when Catholicism could multiply and cultivate its own scholastic traditions behind closed doors. What they are now facing is a call to creativity and leadership. . . . We are no longer talking about the comfortable old either-or between accommodation and rejection, but about creative criticism and critical creativity.” By the same token, Przywara faulted Scholastic Thomism for not being Catholic enough, i.e., for not recognizing the relativity of Thomas’s own theology, however towering, vis-à-vis the Church as a whole. Certainly, he believed, the Church needs Thomas, but not Thomas alone—no more than it needed Luther alone.

meets the eye, for example, whether omnipotence can tolerate any ceding of power. For if it can, we are that much closer to seeing how power could be manifest in its surrender. Next let us see how Przywara understands Thomas's doctrine of divine simplicity, and whether there is more to it than meets the eye. Of course, we already know that, for Thomas, divine simplicity can tolerate intra-divine relations. But can it tolerate humility, which would seem to be opposed to the majesty of any classical philosophical conception of the Deity? Furthermore, can it tolerate something like an intra-divine kenosis, which would seem to disturb the tranquility of the divine nature? I would argue that it can, but for this we need to break through philosophical metaphysics to theological metaphysics, recognizing that God is not a simple abstraction, but a simple *movement*, namely, of love. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

With regard, first, to God's power, Przywara's reading strikingly shows that, for Thomas, God's power is manifested most perfectly *not* in the exercise of total control—as a certain understanding of divine power would have it, which led ominously to nominalistic conceptions of divine power in the late Middle Ages, to the corruption of papal power during the Renaissance, to the dread teachings of the Reformation on predestination, and to corresponding totalitarian visions of the modern State—but in the creation and toleration of real secondary causes.⁸⁰ Indeed, far from being a tyrant bent on total control or the crass exhibition of power, God is powerful enough to *give up* his power, even “to the point that the creature is permitted to contradict God”⁸¹—not, of course, in such a way that God's ends could finally be thwarted, but in such a wonderful way that his will is infallibly achieved through rational creatures whose freedom he just as infallibly respects.

But if this is so, then Thomas's understanding of divine power cannot be aligned without further ado with late-medieval conceptions of it, or those conceptions one finds in Luther or Calvin, though any number of passages

⁸⁰ *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, corp.: “Out of the eminence of its goodness, the first cause gives to other things not only their existence but the power also to be causes themselves.”

⁸¹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 294. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 5, a. 5, ad 3: “Deus plus amat quod est magis bonum, et ideo magis vult praesentiam magis boni quam absentiam minus mali. . . : ideo ad hoc quod aliqua bona maiora eliciantur, permittit aliquos in mala culpa cadere, quae maxime secundum genus sunt odibilia” (“God more greatly loves the greater good—and thus more greatly desires the presence of the greater good—than he does the absence of the lesser evil . . . : thus, in order that certain greater goods might be brought forth, he permits some to fall into evil crimes, of a kind most odious”; translation mine).

in Thomas could give the impression that he was a proto-Calvinist. For, according to the terms of Thomas's metaphysics, omnipotence is powerful enough to tolerate and work with other powers. One could even say that God wills to be weak (in relation to what is not God) in order make room for finite creatures within his infinite life. All of which suggests once more that, in God, strength and weakness, majesty and humility, glory and kenosis, somehow go together—even paradoxically so—not just in the economy of salvation, but even as characteristics of the divine nature.

Now let us consider how Przywara reads Thomas on divine simplicity. While we ordinarily think of simplicity as a simple and impoverished concept, this is not so: in fact, for Thomas, it paradoxically implies plenitude. As Thomas puts it: "It belongs to the perfect unity of God that those things that are multiple and separate in others abide in him simply and singly"; and "Whatever is contained in lower beings deficiently and partially and multiply is contained in higher beings eminently and in a certain kind of fullness and simplicity"; and, again, "In God, as in the highest summit of things, all things super-substantially preexist according to his simple being in itself, as Dionysius says (*Divine Names* I, 5)."⁸² For Thomas, in other words, divine simplicity is no bare abstraction or empty point of singularity, but a perfect fullness, a singularity in which all things that appear "multiple and separate" coincide. But if perfect simplicity includes multiplicity, inasmuch as all things pre-exist in God (the world of essences is not a separate world on which God reflects, but is known essentially in knowing himself), does this mean that God in his simplicity comprises not just things that are opposed, but even apparent contradictions, such as majesty and humility, glory and kenosis?⁸³ Could it be that,

⁸² ST I, q. 13, a. 4, ad 3; I, q. 57, a. 1, corp.

⁸³ *Nota bene*, we are not talking here about "opposites" that admit of no reconciliation whatsoever, except insofar as one is overcome by the other. Such is the "opposition" between good and evil, or as C. S. Lewis fabulously described it in *The Great Divorce*, the "opposition" between heaven and hell, which can never be "married." These, in fact, are *not* genuine opposites; rather, the latter term in each of these "pairs" is a privation of the *reality*, a shadow—long or short—of the other. In other words, evil is not a reality in its own right (it is nothing "known" by God either in the biblical or neo-Platonic sense), and so cannot be part of a *real* pairing of opposites that could be one in God. Rather, we are talking about opposites such as male and female that can be united and in fact are united (as in the mysterious union of man and woman in marriage) as a sign of the more extreme opposition and therefore more mysterious union between Creator and creature in Christ (Eph 5:32). The very logic of Christianity, in fact, compels us to ask this question: If Creator and creature, than which no greater opposition can be imagined, can be one in Christ, *vere Deus et vere homo*, is it not possible that the simplicity of the

even for Thomas, divine simplicity is, at some level, paradoxical, or at least appears so to finite minds inasmuch as they operate at the level of discursive thought (διάνοια), where things fall into this and that, and not that of noetic insight?

To answer these questions we need to probe more deeply what we mean by divine simplicity. For if we admit with Thomas that divine simplicity is no mere abstraction from multiplicity, but a singularity that mysteriously contains all multiplicity, we come back inexorably to the question of the relation of the One and the many; more precisely, we come back to the question of how the many are *united* in the One such that the One *is* the One—the simple One in which all things separate and multiple coincide—and not just one item, as it were, one thing set over against many other things. All of which is related to the ancient question of the “middle” or what mediates between the One and the many. Is it the human being who possesses both a material body and a spiritual soul—whom the fifth-century neo-Platonist Hierocles described as a “middle ground” (μεσότης), being “the last thing from on high” and “the first of those below,” and whom the rhapsodic Pico described as an “intermediary between creatures” and the “marriage hymn of the world”?⁸⁴ Or is it the pure spirits, the angels, whose knowledge is both receptive and productive, whose freedom is intermediate between God’s immutable freedom and the vacillating freedom of human beings?⁸⁵

For Przywara, following Thomas, it is neither angels nor men who comprise the middle, for “all of these revelations of God as middle fall short of the *personal* revelation of God as middle in the ‘mediator.’”⁸⁶ In other words, the middle is Christ (1 Tim 2:5), who by virtue of his descent transcends all creaturely forms of mediation (e.g., from the human being to angels). Indeed, as the unique “way in which God-the-middle assumes the All,” he is “the unifying head of everything from the invisible to the

divine nature as a simplicity comprising apparent opposites is the ground and final transcendental condition for the possibility of so exceedingly great a union?

⁸⁴ See Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 92; see also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. Robert Caponigri (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1956), 3: “Man is the intermediary between creatures, . . . the familiar of the gods above him as he is lord of the beings beneath him, . . . set midway between the timeless unchanging and the flux of time; the living union (as the Persians say), the very marriage hymn of the world.”

⁸⁵ See Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 298.

⁸⁶ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 303, 301.

visible, not only of all persons of every age, but also of pure spirits.”⁸⁷ But, for Przywara, the uniqueness of Christ consists not simply in that he is “the One” in whom God and creation are one in the hypostatic union, or even the One in and through whom God is eschatologically all-in-all (1 Cor 15:28). Przywara strikingly adds that Christ is the manifest “uniqueness” (*Einzigkeit*) of God himself: “the ‘All-in-one’ of the mediator [is] the immediate visibility of the oneness of God.”⁸⁸ What are we to make of this statement? At the very least it suggests that, for Przywara, we can no longer speak of divine simplicity in the abstract, but must do so in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, whose unique mediation makes him the Christ, the Messiah, and therewith *the* manifestation of the oneness and uniqueness of the God of Israel (cf. Deut 6:4). In other words, one cannot be a thoroughgoing monotheist apart from him.

But if this is so, things immediately *appear* more complicated. For the unity of the mediator is not simply a unity that includes multiplicity and apparent antitheses (e.g., between matter and spirit, male and female, Jew and Gentile), but a unity that bears in itself—and overcomes in itself—the real contradiction of sin. As Przywara puts it: “The mediator appears not merely as a human being (rather than pure spirit), but as the expiation for sin. . . . Hence, what is meant by the concrete form that ‘God-as-middle’ assumes in the mediator is . . . a ‘oneness’ with (through the vicarious bearing of) the nothingness of sin.”⁸⁹ Far, however, from this being an admission of defect in God, it is precisely in this way, by virtue of this marvelous exchange in the “scandal of the Cross,” that Christ brings all things to perfection, which is to say, makes all things one in God.⁹⁰ When, therefore, we speak of divine simplicity, what we mean is no empty singularity, nor even the ideal implication of all things in the eternal Logos, but the *real* unity of all things in the *incarnate* Logos, in whose body we see the oneness of God.

Now, admittedly, this is precisely where one might want to distinguish between the unity of the Trinity from all eternity and the unity of a perfected cosmos in Christ in order to avoid any lingering specter of Hegelianism—even if we are not talking about the relation between God and creation as such, but about the relation between God and a *perfected* creation, which, having reached its end, has become a transparency of God

⁸⁷ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 301.

⁸⁸ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 301.

⁸⁹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 302; see *ST* III, q. 1, a. 3, corp., and *De veritate*, q. 29, a. 4, ad 3.

⁹⁰ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 305.

who is now all-in-all. And, in fact, this is precisely what Przywara does, underscoring the final difference between God and the perfected universe, even and precisely where Thomas himself could appear to conflate them.⁹¹ What is at issue here, however, is not whether the unity of God is reducible to the unity of a perfected universe (for Przywara, it is not), but what the unity of God in Christ says about divine simplicity.

Which raises the following question: is it possible that divine simplicity might include not just things that are opposed in the way that male and female are opposed, however wonderful an image of divine simplicity their union-in-difference may be, but even contraries such as majesty and humility, plenitude and poverty, glory and kenosis?⁹² In other words, is it possible that a Thomistic account of divine simplicity, taken to its logical conclusion, might entail what Nicholas of Cusa meant by a *coincidentia oppositorum*?⁹³ Of course, we need to be careful here if we are not to identify God as the identity of creaturely contradictions, and so succumb to Hegel's absolutizing of dialectic.⁹⁴ In light of a natural theology of polarity,

⁹¹ Przywara, *Analogia Entis*, 594: "However much God may reveal himself as veiled in the 'all in all' of time and space, or even, in the bold words of the book of Sirach (43:27), simply as 'the all' (in the way that even Thomas Aquinas speaks almost interchangeably of God and the universe), . . . this same God declares himself as the Sovereign God preeminently in the 'καρπός,' in the breaking open of every context as the ever new turning point of an ever new turn." See *De potentia*, q. 5, a. 4., corp.: "Unde idem est dictu, quod Deus omnia propter se ipsum fecit, et quod creaturas fecerit propter earum esse, quod dicitur Sap. I, 14: creavit enim ut essent omnia" ("Consequently it amounts to the same whether we say that God made all things for himself according to the text of Proverbs xvi, 4, *The Lord hath made all things for himself*, or that he made creatures that they might exist, according to Wisdom, i, 14, *He created all things that they might be*"). Cf.: *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 16, corp.; a. 17, corp.; *ST I*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 5.

⁹² Let us reiterate immediately that we are not talking here about "contraries" such as good and evil, since these are *not* real contraries, however real our experience of them as contraries may be in a fallen order. For inasmuch as evil is only a privation of being, it cannot be a contradiction per se without ceasing to be at all.

⁹³ See, for instance, *ST I*, q. 47, a. 1 corp. According to Przywara, Thomas is the link between Pseudo-Dionysius and Cusanus, who explicates what Thomas implies. See also Przywara's review, "Plotin und Nicholas von Cues," *Stimmen der Zeit* 134 (1938): 263; cf. *Analogia Entis*, 273, 473, 487.

⁹⁴ To this end, following Przywara's understanding of the *analogia entis*, we need to recognize that the unity of creaturely opposites (*allo pros allo*) is not itself divine, but only a mysterious *image* of the Divine. In fact, Przywara does not even allow that we call God himself a coincidence of opposites; rather, he posits that the coincidence of opposites is the veil before the mystery of God himself. See his tellingly entitled essay "Thomas or Hegel? Zum Sinn der 'Wende zum Objekt,'" *Logos: Zeitschrift für systematische Philosophie* 15 (1926): 13; reprinted in *Ringgen*

however, which points to a simpler source, and *a fortiori* in light of Christ as *totus Deus et totus homo*, it should be obvious that such an understanding of divine simplicity is indeed possible—and that the “ever-greater God” (of majesty) is the “ever-smaller God” (of humility)—unless one does not see in Christ the oneness of *God*, or see in his kenosis the glory of *God*.

Conclusion: An Ode to Divine Humility

We have thus far intimated that humility is not only a human virtue (as Thomas himself says), but also a perfection and power of the divine nature. For it is owing to humility that God is *able* to condescend to become a man like any other, submit to the demands of ordinary human life, and in supreme humility take upon himself the sins of the world. To attribute such humility only to the human nature of the Son, and not to see it as an aspect of the *nature* of the Son of God *secundum quod Deus*, whose native humility is the condition of the possibility of his assuming a nature that could suffer humiliation on our behalf, would therefore seem shortsighted.⁹⁵ We have, however, one more step to take in order to connect these reflections on humility with the metaphysical genius of Thomas, and to show that, as a genuine mendicant, his thought is not only capacious enough to admit *divine* humility, but poor enough to beg for it. But how could this be, when Thomas seems to have ruled out this possibility?

The easiest way through the apparent aporia and toward a reconciliation of the Thomists and the Balthasarians, would be to sharpen our hearing and attend to the semantic range of the word “humility,” distinguishing between the requisite humility of submission, which is owed to another as a subject to a king, and the voluntary humility of love, which submits to another out of love (see Eph 5:25). For his part, Thomas seems to have

der Gegenwart (Augsburg: Benno-Filser, 1929), 947: “By ‘polarity’ is meant the profoundest recognition of the creaturely as such, the profoundest glimpse [*Blick*] into its essence as an open [*aufgerissene*] ‘question,’ the ‘answer’ to which is God understood as pure being beyond all polarity—not that He himself is the ‘*coincidentia oppositorum*,’ but that the *coincidentia oppositorum* [is] the revelation of what defies all creaturely comprehension, the image through which the creature intimates Him as the one who stands beyond every creaturely analogy as the *Deus tamquam ignotus*, the unknown God, as Thomas says in reference to the greatest knowledge of God (*In Boeth. De Trin.* q. 1. a. 1 ad 2).”

⁹⁵ Part of the fear here, of course, is that, if one admits humility, one *eo ipso* admits passibility in some form as well, but this is not so, for humility is not a passion, but a power. Let us therefore be clear, so that out of fear of betraying God’s divinity we do not end up robbing him of his glory, which is the glory of his humility: to admit divine humility is not to admit divine suffering, but only the condition of the possibility of God suffering for love’s sake.

understood humility more in terms of the former, as the appropriate virtue vis-à-vis the Creator, making it difficult, if not impossible, for him to attribute humility to the Creator himself (since in God there is absolutely no need for submission, unless one may speak paradoxically of the “voluntary necessity” of love, which “demands” it).

But if the answer to this disputed question is to be Christological, and not based upon a predetermined concept of Divinity, we need to consider the humility of Christ—and not just *secundum quod homo*, but *secundum quod Deus*. For with respect to Christ’s divinity, humility does not mean the obligated submission of an inferior to a superior power, but the voluntary submission of God himself. And if this voluntary sense of humility is the transcendental condition for the possibility of the Incarnation, then we have strong theological reason to see this latter sense of humility as the *primary* meaning of the word to which all the other meanings of humility *per analogiam* imperfectly refer. For such voluntary submission is not a sign of weakness, but of strength, indeed, divine virtue, which raises yet another question for those who would deny divine humility: Could God produce such a virtue in creatures if he did not possess it himself? In other words, if God can produce wisdom in creatures because he is Wisdom Itself, could He, who *invariably* brings about humility in the saints, fail to be Humility Itself? But, as convincing as Christ and the saints should be, there is another way to divine humility, which leads through Thomas’s metaphysics.

According to Thomas, God as the Creator is at once *interior omni re*, that is, intimate to all things, and *exterior omni re*, that is, transcending all things: “Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime. Deus est supra omnia per excellentiam suae naturae, et tamen est in omnibus rebus, ut causans omnium esse.”⁹⁶ In other words, for Thomas, God is mysteriously immanent and transcendent at once. Nor is this teaching peculiar to Thomas. On the contrary, it goes back at least to Augustine, who was surprised and overwhelmed to discover the same thing: “tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo.”⁹⁷ Indeed, this teaching is so basic to Catholic theology that Przywara could define the *analogia entis*—and

⁹⁶ *S.T. I*, q. 8, a. 1, corp. and ad 1: “God is in all things, and intimately. . . . [He] is above all things by the excellence of his nature, but nevertheless in all things as the cause of their being.”

⁹⁷ See Augustine, *De genesis ad littera* 8.26 and 8.48: “interior omni re, quia in ipso sunt omnia, et exterior omni re, quia ipse est super omnia.” (“[He is] interior to every thing since all things are in him, and exterior to each thing, since he is above all things”).

the Catholic concept of God—in precisely such terms over against every *halving* of the mystery, whether on the part of modern philosophies of immanence (from Spinoza onward) or dialectical theologies of one-sided transcendence (as in the early Barth). What is relevant here, however, is the question of *how* God is immanent to all things, and whether this is not precisely a function of humility, of condescension, of God making room, so to speak, within his infinity, withdrawing into hiddenness and even into apparent nothingness, in order to let beings freely be, in order to say, “Let there be [another] light.”⁹⁸

Admittedly, humility is not the first thing that comes to mind when we think of creation. We might even consider the notion so odd that we dismiss it out of hand as apocryphal, perhaps kabbalistic, and thus outside the canon of orthodox theology. Instead, and naturally enough, we tend to conceive of creation in artistic terms. For God is the Creator—in Hamann’s phrase, the “Poet at the beginning of days.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, as a work of the Father’s “two hands,” creation is at once a work of the Spirit, which is to say, a work of inspiration par excellence, and a work of the Logos on whom it is pattered as its formal cause, making the Father’s work in creation an original work of inspired wisdom. A further merit of the artistic analogy is that it helpfully illuminates the dynamic nature of God’s relation to creation, namely, as at once immanent to it and transcending it, and therefore underwrites the conception of God as we have described it in terms of the *analogia entis*. Take, for example, the traditional differences between a classical and a Romantic sensibility, which one sometimes finds in the same artist. According to a classical conception, the artist maintains a measured distance from his or her work, whose perfection is a thing radiant unto itself, splendid in its own integrity and proportion—on one reading of the last verse of Mörike’s famous poem: “Was aber schön ist, selig scheint es in ihm selbst” (“But what is beautiful shines by itself”).¹⁰⁰ According to a more lyric, Romantic conception, on the other hand, the artist is not only personally invested in his or her work, but expresses himself or herself *in it*. Indeed, whereas the classical conception emphasizes the cool and sober distance between the artist and the artwork, the

⁹⁸ As Hamann put it to Kant in the context of the *Kinderphysik* fiasco, “creation is a work not of vanity, but of humility, of condescension,” which Schelling subsequently affirmed, as we have seen. See Hamann, *Briefwechsel*, 1:452. For a discussion of the *Kinderphysik* fiasco, see Betz, *After Enlightenment*, 84–87.

⁹⁹ Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:206.

¹⁰⁰ See “Auf eine Lampe,” in Eduard Mörike, *Werke*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1954), 105.

Romantic conception emphasizes the fiery, passionate, invested presence of the artist in his or her work, to the point that, in expressionism, the work is entirely an expression of the artist's sensibility or state of mind and has no integral existence apart from the artist. Translated into theological terms, whereas the classical conception bespeaks the Creator's transcendence and difference from creation (which God could, as it were, coolly and soberly do without: he has no need of it), the Romantic conception bespeaks the Creator's immanence and intimacy to creation, in which he is, so to speak, passionately invested, to the point of being head-over-heels in love and self-identified with it.

But if the artistic metaphor does all the work required in order to give us a sense of God's relation to creation as *at once* radically immanent and transcendent, what need is there to understand creation in terms of humility? For that matter, if what is really at issue here is God's immanence to creation, does not love get us all that we need—the love that reaches even into the depths of hell to recover the beloved, and of which even poets before and after Christ, and in secret testimony to him, from the Psalmist (Ps 139) to Rilke, have sung? Once the matter is framed this way, that is, as concerning the nature of love, which knows no bounds and holds nothing back, as John of the Cross says in the *Spiritual Canticle*, the shift in perspective is slight indeed. In fact, we have already arrived at our conclusion. For it amounts to seeing that humility is one of love's perfections.¹⁰¹ Indeed, we can say on apostolic authority, as a matter of definition, that *love is humble*, that it does not seek its own (1 Cor 13:5), but lowers itself and abases itself, even to the point of becoming nothing out of love for the beloved, who may not be worthy of it (Rom 5:8). To speak of divine humility, then, is to speak of nothing new, certainly nothing heterodox, but merely of the depths—the bathos—of divine love. To be sure, we still speak truly if we say that God is “in” creation by virtue of his love, but now we can see that love, to the extent that it is genuine, always comes with and by way of humility—just as the love of the Spirit comes through the humility of the Son.

So, returning to the question as to how God is *interior omni rei*, we can now say that it is by virtue of humility. (For that matter, following Ferdinand Ulrich, whose reading of *Thomas's* metaphysics bears great importance to *Balthasar's* kenotic theology, we could even say that nothing is except by humility, that is, by that kenotic gift of being whereby any

¹⁰¹ As Przywara puts it, humility is one of the *Erscheinungsformen* of genuine Christian love—the other being patience; see his late work *Demut, Geduld, Liebe* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1960), 47.

being is.¹⁰²) By the same token we can say that by humility God supports all things, just as by his majesty he governs all things. In the marvelous words of Gregory the Great:

In order that the Almighty God may declare to all that He is within and above, He says that heaven is His throne. Truly in order to show that He encompasses all things He affirms that He measures heaven in a palm and encloses the earth in a fist. Then He is Himself inside and outside, Himself above and below; above by ruling, below by bearing, inside by filling, outside by encompassing. And he is so inside that he may be outside, He so encompasses that He may bear, He so bears that he may preside. . . . Hence the prophet also says to the Author of all: "Thy knowledge is too wonderful for me" [Ps 138:6] . . . [and having] labored with his understanding in the knowledge of God, tiring and failing, he added: "It is mighty, I cannot attain to it."¹⁰³

As perplexing as this mystagogical passage may be, it is a fitting place to conclude. For it brings us to the threshold of the real Christological mystery where paradoxes abound, where the outside is the inside, the above is the below, the transcendent is the immanent—and thus to the threshold of the mystery we have been circumscribing all along, namely, that in God majesty and humility are one. But in the light of revelation, which is greater than the light of the philosophers, should this really surprise us? Do we not confess that Christ is fully God and fully man, that in him the way up is the way down (Eph 4:9), that in him the humble are exalted (Matt 23:12), and that by emptying himself he fills all things (Eph 1:23)?

Admittedly, the foregoing might appear to be a digression from the

¹⁰² See Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. D. C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic Press, 2018), originally published as *Homo Abyssus: Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* in 1961. Although it cannot be elaborated here, this text is arguably as crucial to understanding the *Thomistic* elements of Balthasar's late theology, in say, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, as Przywara's *Analogia Entis* is to understanding the *Thomistic* elements informing Balthasar's early theology, as in *Theo-Logic*, vol. 1. Any genuine engagement with Balthasar would therefore have to engage these texts as well.

¹⁰³ Gregory the Great, *Homilae in Hiezechielem* 2.5.11, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson in *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet of Ezekiel* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2008), 342. For the patristic and early medieval reception of Ezekiel's vision, see Angela Russell Christman, "What did Ezekiel See?" *Christian Exegesis of Ezekiel's Vision of the Chariot from Irenaeus to Gregory the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

disputed question with which we started, but it has all been for the sake of this point: that there is more to humility than meets the eye; that humility is in fact glorious, as it is in Christ, his Mother, and his saints; and that this is *no accident* of the economy of salvation, but a revelation of the nature of God himself.¹⁰⁴

N.V

¹⁰⁴ Whether, following Bruce McCormack's reading of Barth, one understands the humility of God in terms of God's eternal election to be for us in Christ is another question, since this, too, albeit with the qualification of an eternal election, makes humility a function of the economy. But Catholic theology can nevertheless be confident following Barth when he says: "The humility in which [God] dwells and acts in Jesus Christ is not alien to him but proper to him" (*Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance [London: T&T Clark, 2004], 193). My thanks in conclusion to Bruce McCormack for his friendship and for his invigorating work on this same topic. May it be fruitful for the whole Church.